

The Fourth Sunday of Lent 2009
March 22, 2009

Welcome to the corridor of misery.

Have you ever been miserable and found your way out?

We often associate misery with things like having the flu. You know that experience when your head feels like someone hit you with a 2/4 and you become immobilized. You desperately seek the cold medicines that only seem to perpetuate the problem. Finally someone shows up with a nice bowl of chicken soup and at last compassionate relief.

Or after having suffered an awful calamity or misfortune and all you want to do is hide yourself and pray that you will wake up from this nightmare. And someone seemingly out of nowhere offers a word of encouragement that you are able to cling to.

Today's scripture invites us to recognize the saving grace of God throughout our Judeo Christian history. We are invited to see Christ as that agent of transformation that allowed humanity to climb out of its misery; Out of darkness into light.

Without a doubt at one time in our life or another we have all have walked this corridor of misery.

In this corridor we are likely to meet many a friend. After all misery loves company. From time to time we all enjoy things like venting, commiserating, letting our tempers flare and our hearts pour out. We need to let off a little steam and let our hair down. Well at least for those of us who have hair. We probably passed through it many a time and might even be finding ourselves there today.

A corridor is intended to have an entrance and an exit. Misery is not designed to be a place of permanent residence rather a passage, a temporary stop along the path of life.

Our problems are amplified and the causes of our malaise is always pointed away from ourselves and onto someone else. There is always a target. Whether that target be our leadership or someone who is new or not part of the group, or someone who is different from us ...The fingers are pointed and as long as you are not the one being pointed at there is a temptation to hang out as misery is a pretty comfortable spot.

Scripture offers us a prime example from the Book of Numbers this morning.

Consider the Israelites as they were hunkered down in the desert and things weren't moving fast enough for them. They were not getting all they wanted and their faith in their leaders began to wane. They began to wallow in their misery. It was out of the misery and the consequences of it that led them to prayer. In prayer healing would come to them.

If we are determined to take a self guided tour through the corridor of misery there soon becomes no room for thanksgiving or appreciation. No sense or reflection of the sacrifice of others. No place for personal responsibility or fairness or justice. All that consumes the space is our unmet needs or desires. We can become extremely oppositional. We are not happy and if we aren't happy then darn it nobody else is going to be. We seek to bring others down with us.

Like the Hogwarts school of Harry Potter series In the corridor of misery there are many secret passageways that move us deeper and deeper into misery,

The pool of self pity. Some who settle here could find themselves drowning in their own tears. So absorbed with themselves they cannot see a way beyond them.

The mirrored maze of comparisons here some remain lost in confusion as to what is the image and what is really their identity.

The rock garden of judgment and accusation. Here is practiced the ancient craft of stoning. All who enter carry with them in their heart their enemy and seek to destroy them by verbal assault.

The upper room of defeatism and perfectionism. In these rooms the bar is set so high that no one could ever reach it

None of us need to find ourselves trapped in any of these rooms. We are encouraged to enter the corridor of misery but to also find our way out.

There is indeed some healthy and cathartic experiences that can be had by doing so. We often seek out guides who assist us . These guides allow us to vent and to share our misery, hurt pain or agony but also do not allow us to wallow or dwell unnecessarily in it.

Paul as a guide to the people of Ephesus, reminds them that they too were once among the lost, once among those who were living in darkness, hampered down by the shadows and fears of life. Yet now through the loving grace of Jesus they have indeed have a new identity, a new purpose, a new meaning, a new freedom .

In this gospel we hear Jesus speaking to Nicodemus the words I have come not to condemn the world but to save it. Nicodemus, a leader among the chief priests who comes to him in darkness, confused, bewildered. He is

unsure of where this Jesus fits into all that he has taught from the Torah about the Messiah. What Jesus is saying is blasphemous and punishable by death. This Jesus of Nazareth is claiming to be the Son of God. For Christians Jesus is the door from which we leave this corridor of misery and begin to embrace life in its fullness.

The gospel and mercy of God lies in stark contrast to this pre-occupation with the self and the standards of impossible perfection we set for others. The gospel calls for mercy and not judgment, compassion and not ridicule, healing and not torture, responsibility and not blame,

In this season of Lent may we experience our own miserable meanderings as a corridor to grace. In doing so we may want to ask ourselves a few questions

Have we allowed God's Word to be like chicken soup to our miserable soul?

Have we looked for open doors in our faith life?

Have we had a relationship with God in which we experienced His mercy and grace?

What may it be about our faith in the Risen Lord that has moved us out and beyond our misery?